



Community and Public Sector Union

28 July 2021

Mr Rick Wilson MP
Chair, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

By email: pwc@aph.gov.au rick.wilson@aph.gov.au

Re: Home Affairs 101 George Street Parramatta Fit-Out

Dear Committee

Following the CPSU email of 15 July 2021 [text attached] to you in relation to the Inquiry into **Home Affairs 101 George Street Parramatta Fit-Out**, the Department provided us with a copy of their supplementary submission on Friday, 23 July 2021. Accordingly, we provide further comment on this matter.

Impact on staff

The Department claimed in their evidence to the committee that no staff members have indicated that the move would jeopardise their capacity to continue their employment with the agency. We are aware that for many staff this is a very real concern. There is a genuine anxiety about explicitly raising this through formal channels because of a fear this information will be used against them in relation to career and development opportunities in the interim period and this may be why none have specifically raised it. The advice to the Sydney Accommodation Working Group that staff can not access the ASPC redeployment register, and the support for staff the Department refers to in the supplementary submission, indicate that the Department is aware that is a very real issue for many staff.

A CPSU survey in 2020 completed by about a third of the affected staff showed that of the 284 respondents, 73 would experience increases to their existing commutes of more than one hour each way, and that 91 would experience increases of between thirty minutes and one hour each way. This is a significant impact that appears to have had absolutely no bearing on the decisions of the organisation in relation to this matter.

Consultation

Staff initially found out about the potential for this move in a newspaper article in late 2019. We understand the Department was first approached by the landlord of 26 Lee St about their proposed redevelopment (requiring early vacation of the existing lease) in late 2018. Staff were not advised of any potential for relocation until 06/11/2019, with formal consultation through the Sydney Accommodation Working Group, convened after a request from CPSU, commencing in February 2020. While the Sydney Accommodation Working Group has met

on a handful of occasions, this process has been focused on providing information to staff about the Department's plans and how they intend to manage the transition, not about genuinely considering staff views and legitimate concerns in relation to this move. Given the potential impact on staff, it is the CPSU view that this approach to consultation is deeply flawed.

Genuine consideration of Elizabeth Street lease renewal

The Department's initial submission stated that lease extensions were not available on either of the current Sydney locations. A simple google search of 300 Elizabeth Street revealed available floor space of 1300 – 2600 sq m for lease at that site, indicating that an extension of the Elizabeth Street lease was possible.

<https://www.realcommercial.com.au/for-lease/property-level-10-300-elizabeth-sydney-nsw-2000-503611670> Accessed 28/01/2021

CPSU members are concerned that one of the options not considered was the extension of the lease for the Home Affairs site in Elizabeth Street.

Conclusion

CPSU members remain very concerned about the Department's approach to supporting staff for whom the move puts their capacity to work for the Department at risk and believe insufficient merit has been given to this issue right from the initial decision to move all of the CBD based operations to Parramatta. The impact on clients who don't live on a direct public transport route to Parramatta or have their own form of transport also seems to have been ignored. There is also some doubt as to whether or not there was ever any consideration of the option of extending the Elizabeth Street lease to accommodate some functions, combined with a smaller consolidation to Parramatta.

As stated in the CPSU submission, the most obvious way to mitigate the adverse impacts on staff would be to retain a footprint in Sydney's CBD.

We are also disappointed that we have not been provided with an opportunity to appear before the Committee on this matter and remain available and willing to do so.

We ask that in the preparation of your report these very real concerns of staff are reflected in the recommendations, and that approval for this project not be given until the staff issues have been resolved.

Please note that Cameron Smith, the CPSU Organiser who has been working on this issue is currently on parental leave. Either myself or [REDACTED] [REDACTED] can be contacted if any further information is required.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]
Karen Atherton
National Political Coordinator

m: [REDACTED]
e: [REDACTED]

CPSU EMAIL TO COMMITTEE – 15 JULY 2021

From: Cameron Smith <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, 15 July 2021 2:19 PM
To: pwc@aph.gov.au <pwc@aph.gov.au>; rick.wilson@aph.gov.au <rick.wilson@aph.gov.au>
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: CPSU concerns re: Home Affairs 101 George Street Parramatta Fit-Out

Dear Committee Chair and Secretary,

I hope you are well. I write as the CPSU organiser representing workers in the Department of Home Affairs in NSW.

Following the Committee's hearing on 2 July, we remain concerned about a number of aspects of the Department's position on the proposed works:

1. The CPSU has not been provided with a copy of the Department's supplementary submission, which purportedly responds to the CPSU's submission. Could the Committee please provide a copy of this supplementary submission to the CPSU as soon as is practicable?
2. The CPSU remains concerned that the Department has not appropriately consulted with impacted employees about the location of the new accommodation. While the Department claims that it has done so through the Sydney Accommodation Working Group, the information shared in that forum has been perfunctory and, as our submission outlines, the Department has not given workers an opportunity to have any meaningful say in the location of the accommodation, nor the fit-out itself. The sharing of information does not 'consultation' in and of itself; employees must be given a bona fide opportunity to influence the decision-maker. No such opportunity was provided.
3. The Department claimed in its submissions that '[they] have not had any staff member come to [them] and explicitly say, 'No, we will not relocate.' This is a misleading comment, because the Department has not asked affected workers whether they will be able to relocate. The CPSU's survey of its members in 2020 showed that, of 284 respondents, 73 stated their commute times will increase by more than 1 hour each way, while 91 stated their commute times will increase by 30 minutes to an hour each way. It is reasonable to extrapolate from this data that a very significant proportion of the Department's workforce will be forced to consider alternative employment as a result of this relocation.
4. Moreover, the Department does not appear to have considered the impacts of no longer having a presence in the Sydney CBD, which will make its services harder to access for many stakeholders. Additionally, the Department's refusal to consider maintaining a presence in the Sydney CBD appears to be at odds with the Prime Minister's recent exhortation to APS agencies to contribute to the revitalisation of CBDs during and following the COVID-19 pandemic (see <https://www.themandarin.com.au/140912-morrison-signals-push-for-public-servants-to-return-to-cbds/>).
5. If the Committee is unwilling to recommend that the Department maintain a presence in the Sydney CBD that will house at least 300 staff in order to remedy the issues referred to above and in our submission, we ask that the Committee consider recommendations that the Department take steps to assure staff that they will facilitate a higher proportion of working from home than what is currently available, and to meaningfully facilitate the redeployment of impacted employees to alternative employment in the APS who wish to seek redeployment. To date, the Department has expended no effort to either end, and has indicated that it does not intend to beyond the encouragement of employees to apply for jobs of their own volition,

6. and to talk with their management about any opportunities that may be available (local management would be unlikely to have any insight as to the availability of other possible opportunities within other agencies).

Should the Committee wish to seek further submissions from the CPSU on the matters raised above and in our submission, we would be happy to do so either via a private or public hearing. We can also facilitate the involvement of worker representatives if the Committee wishes to hear directly from Departmental employees about the impacts of the proposed relocation.

I look forward to your response.

Kind regards,



Cameron Smith | Field Organiser – Protection, Information and Public Accountability |
CPSU | pronouns: he/him | m: [REDACTED] | www.cpsu.org.au | member service centre:
1300 137 636

CPSU acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to culture, language, land, waters and community. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.